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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7274  
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RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0974  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4527  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8065  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5626  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1442  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1390  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000180

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: PROMOTING LEARNING AND LIVELIHOODS IN CHIN STATE

REF: 07 RANGOON 1118

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Classified By: Poloff Chelsia Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a country where many are impoverished and oppressed, the Chins are among the most destitute. Tedim, a town of 13,000 people located in the remote northern Chin hills, depends on sparse agricultural production and remittances from abroad for its meager income. Two Embassy-funded groups work to make living in Tedim a little easier. Daikonia Myanmar runs the only public lending library in the town and conducts computer literacy classes as part of its Embassy small grant. The Tedim Baptist Convention used Embassy funding to train 30 women last year in basic tailoring skills for income generation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 25 Poloff and LES traveled from Kalay in Sagaing Division to Tedim, Chin State to monitor two Embassy-funded grants projects. The town, with a population of approximately 13,000, is the largest in its district. The steep surrounding mountains afford infertile soil for agriculture and only very limited opportunities for trade. As a result, the town and its surrounding villages survive primarily on subsistence agriculture and remittances from relatives abroad. Government workers rely on bribes to supplement their salaries.

¶3. (C) Life in the nearby villages is even more difficult than in town, said Reverend Zen Thawng, General Secretary of the Tedim Baptist Convention. Many of the villagers spend their annual income of less than \$100 in four or five months, making the rest of the year very difficult, he explained. Villagers survive the remaining months of shortage primarily through barter due to the scarcity of liquid cash.

¶4. (C) Communication with the outside world is one of the town's major problems, says Pau Suan Kam, President of the Embassy-funded library Daikonia Myanmar. In the entire town, there are only 500 phone lines and no internet access. People in Ton Zaing and Tedim districts, the two most northern districts of Chin State, must travel to Kalay if

they want to use the internet. In some instances, a trip to Kalay from the remote parts of northern Chin State could involve a two-day hike and then a two-day drive, as is the case with Tuimui village in which we have another small grant project. In addition to the difficulty of the journey itself, some travelers to Kalay face security threats from rebels that hide in the hills.

¶5. (C) With funding from Embassy Rangoon's small grants program, Daikonia Myanmar and the Tedim Baptist Convention work to alleviate the poverty and isolation of people in Tedim and its surrounding villages. Daikonia Myanmar houses a library of nearly 1,000 volumes, the only circulating library in the town. It receives weekly donations of journals from World Vision and has benefited from book donations from the Embassy-facilitated Books for Asia program of the Asia Foundation. During our two-hour visit, five large boxes of books that we had sent from Rangoon months before arrived in Tedim by bus. The library is open every day except Wednesdays, and Pau Suan Kam said that they have approximately 30 patrons daily during the week, and 50 on Saturdays and Sundays. Library patrons primarily consist of students and a few pastors who use the quiet environment to study and prepare their Sunday sermons.

¶6. (C) Daikonia Myanmar also has a telephone line and five computers that the Embassy funds. Instructors have completed one two-month computer training course with six students and they plan to hold another beginning on March 15, which will also include computer accountancy and English. This course is one of only three computer courses available in the town, and by far the least expensive with a cost of \$18 for two months.

¶7. (C) Pau Suan Kam expressed interest in applying for another grant to fund internet installation at the library.

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Having internet in Tedim, he argued, would save people the time and expense of spending several days traveling to Kalay to conduct business. He believes that once the internet is installed, it would pay for itself with user fees. Users from throughout Ton Zaing and Tedim districts would come to use internet in Tedim, he asserted.

¶8. (C) The Tedim Baptist Convention used its Embassy grant to conduct a one-month tailoring training course for 30 women in July 2007. Women can use their skills to supplement their meager household incomes. Reverend Zen Thawng explained that one blouse could earn the food equivalent of 600 kyat or USD 0.52, enough to feed a family of five for a day. Most of the trainees are married women aged 25 to 35, who need the income to feed their children. During our visit, three men walked from surrounding villages to thank us for our support. They said that the training has helped their families put food on the table when otherwise there would have been none.

¶9. (C) The Tedim Baptist Convention has just been awarded another grant to conduct a two-month tailoring training this year. In feedback from last year's participants in a one-month training, the primary request was for the training to be longer and more in-depth. The Tedim Baptist Convention hopes to address that need in its new course, which will target women from the surrounding villages rather than from Tedim. 25 women from the villages already plan to participate, along with five women from Tedim.

¶10. (C) Comment. In Burma, as elsewhere, all politics is local. Some of the greatest impact that we can have in promoting democracy and building the capacity of the Burmese people is in remote areas such as Tedim, completely neglected by the regime. The Chins were christianized by American Baptists and remain proud of their ties to the U.S. Lacking the natural resources that the military covets has meant that the Chin people have been left to their own devices to survive. Our small grants empower women and provide more

access to information which will enable the Chin people to  
have greater control over their futures. End Comment.  
VILLAROSA